



WOMEN IN
SCOTTISH AQUACULTURE

THREE YEAR REVIEW





“In the 3 years that it takes a salmon to transform from fertilised egg to adult fish, WiSA has gone from a nascent idea to a mature organisation full of life, energy and impact. On this 3rd anniversary of WiSA’s formation, I am delighted to celebrate our achievements and look forward to a dynamic future, influencing Scottish aquaculture for the better, for women and men alike.”

– Heather Jones, CEO, SAIC

WHERE WE STARTED

March 2019 saw the launch of WiSA (Women in Scottish Aquaculture). With a tagline of **Diversity Makes Us WiSA**, the WiSA Advisory Group and women from across the sector met with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to highlight the challenges and opportunities for women entering and progressing through the sector. At that time, published research showed that only 12% of the aquaculture workforce was female.

Shortly afterwards, on International Women’s Day 2019, representatives from major employers, academia, the supply chain and government joined forces to celebrate **the official launch of WiSA**. This was the start of a journey that has seen WiSA travel all over Scotland; recruiting over 300 members; promoting aquaculture to schools, colleges and universities; providing training and mentoring; organising site visits to farming locations; and bringing women together to catch up with old friends and make new alliances. WiSA members are diverse but have one thing in common: a passion for producing high-quality Scottish seafood, and for championing equal opportunities across our sector.

WiSA has enjoyed **active support** from the Scottish Government, including a commitment in the **Government’s Programme for Scotland 2019-2020** to support the work of WiSA to ‘encourage women to take up careers in the sector and remove barriers to their participation.’

A snapshot of key achievements

- Through WiSA’s successful **mentoring scheme**, we have connected 40 early-stage professionals together with experienced aquaculture leaders, with one pairing even resulting in the formation of a **new start-up company**.
 - For two years running, WiSA has also hosted a Scottish Government-funded **returners’ training programme** for women looking to get back to work after a career break.
 - A New Wave of Talent campaign, in collaboration with SAIC and Lantra, featured **videos** of young women and men at work to promote aquaculture careers. The content has been widely shared and the campaign is ongoing.
 - A dedicated **virtual forum** was launched in October 2021, funded by Marine Scotland, providing a space for WiSA members to connect with and support one another, access events and share career opportunities.
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WHERE WE ARE NOW

Since its inception, WiSA has grown into a powerful grassroots network with influence. Some of the challenges explored or mitigated by the group include housing, childcare, confidence, leadership, and career transitions: ultimately, WiSA not only supports initiatives for women to come into the sector, but actively looks for ways to improve the conditions for those already invested in it.

Feedback from industry has shown that in the last three years, more women have indeed been welcomed into the sector. In many cases, cultures and attitudes are already changing, and we have seen some great progress made through the likes of recruitment approaches, parental leave policies and gender pay gap reporting. But the work goes on.



10
EVENTS



7
NETWORKING
SESSIONS



24
INTERVIEWS



2
MENTORING
COHORTS

40
MENTEES



2
WOMEN
RETURNER
PROGRAMMES



“A job in aquaculture is not just for guys. You need to be hard-working; you need to be ready to be out in the outdoors – but anyone can do that. I don’t believe in ‘a man’s job, a girl’s job’.”

Ivana Russo, BioMar – A New Wave of Talent

SUPPORT WITH TANGIBLE OUTCOMES: THE WISA MENTORING PROGRAMME

WiSA has supported women studying and working in the sector through a variety of initiatives including networking events, career discussions, confidence workshops, aquaculture-specific training, site visits, and a bespoke mentoring programme.

To date, the mentoring programme has trained two cohorts of participants, in 2020 and 2021. One of its most significant outcomes was a successful Seafood Innovation Fund/SAIC bid from four mentees from Strathclyde and Heriot Watt universities, who put together a project to examine the use of sea cucumbers to **minimise the environmental impact** of salmon farming.

Feedback from programme participants:

“The mentoring programme is such a positive, supportive experience. As a mentor, it’s great to have sight of the wealth of talent already within the industry, and really rewarding to be able to help develop people’s confidence and experience to reach their goals.”

“It was a great opportunity to share experiences as well as knowledge, and also to gain a better understanding of current areas that are novel in the aquaculture industry – and learning from my mentee also.”

WISA TIMELINE & MILESTONES

Meeting with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and Roseanna Cunningham MSP, at the Scottish Parliament

March 2019

Official launch of WiSA on International Women’s Day

March 2019

Launch of WiSA Facebook group to support networking and discussion

March 2019

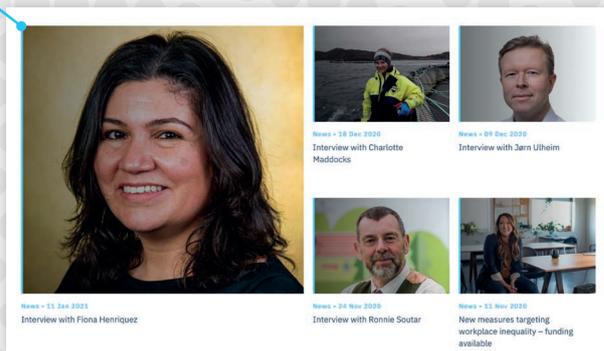
First networking meetings with industry professionals and academics

September 2019

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER: THE WISA INTERVIEW SERIES

A cross-section of people from the aquaculture sector and beyond kindly gave their time to share their experiences and career journeys in the WiSA interview series. From Noelia Rodriguez (Scottish Sea Farms) and Laura Tulip (Mowi), through to Scottish Government Chief Vet Sheila Voas, and Professor Sandra Adams (formerly of the Institute of Aquaculture, University of Stirling), women from very different backgrounds all contributed to give support and guidance to new entrants.

But the interview series didn't just focus on women. Stewart Graham (GaelForce Group), Jørn Ulheim (PatoGen AS), Ronnie Soutar and Jim Gallagher (both Scottish Sea Farms), all shared their career advice and their thoughts on diversity within the sector. We are grateful to everyone who has taken part so far.



ATTRACTING TALENT: REACHING OUTSIDE OUR SECTOR

Much of WiSA's work focuses on raising awareness of the many rewarding career opportunities across all aspects of aquaculture. We have attended college, university and school career fairs; worked with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and Lantra Scotland – which resulted in WiSA being nominated for an ALBAS Award in 2019; and have been selected by the Scottish Government to deliver two Women Returners Programmes in 2021 and 2022.

Participants in the Returners Programme did not necessarily have a background in the aquaculture sector. They were keen to find out more about the reality of working in seafood production and the jobs that are available. The training has prepared the women for interviews, identified transferrable skills, connected them to a supportive network of aquaculture professionals, and increased their confidence in their own abilities.

In partnership with SAIC and Lantra, WiSA created the ongoing New Wave of Talent career campaign, **the launch** of which was supported by Fergus Ewing MSP in 2020 – search **#BeTheNewWave** to discover more.



“I decided the time was right to head back to work but, like many, I found it challenging to kickstart my career again. I then came across the returners programme, which seemed like it had been designed just for me – or at least for people in the same situation. The course was a fantastic opportunity to get back into the swing of things and connect with like-minded people and those currently working in the sector. After completing the programme, I had a new-found sense of enthusiasm for the sector and the confidence to take the next steps towards finding a new role”.

Bridie Grant, Aquaculture Innovation Officer, SAIC, was a participant of the Women Returners Programme

Meeting with Mairi Gougeon MSP, now Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, and announcement of funding from Scottish Government

October 2019

First WiSA mentoring programme cohort kicks off

January 2020

Launch of A New Wave of Talent campaign

January 2020

WiSA website launched

March 2020

GETTING TOGETHER: THREE EVENTFUL YEARS

Over the last three years, WiSA has delivered a suite of diverse and valuable events, such as bringing members together with government representatives; joint academic and industry meetings; guest webinars on subjects as diverse as nutrition and seaweed production; online coaching in confidence building, resilience and mental wellbeing; and topical networking events that have provided peer support for the issues and challenges faced by many. We have also organised site visits to enable knowledge-sharing, coupled with talks from key leaders and sector professionals on their often-surprising career paths.



“The coaching encouraged me to look more critically at what I wanted to get out of employment, in terms of learning and development, and what values were important to me.”

WiSA event participant

MORE THAN JUST TALK: INFLUENCING EMPLOYER POLICIES

One WiSA networking discussion sparked further dialogue between HR professionals and parents at Scottish Sea Farms, resulting in a parental leave policy change in favour of an enhanced paternity pay, in turn allowing fathers the opportunity of time with their new children without financial worry, thus supporting employees and their families in rural communities.

We made a short video about this positive outcome: [A conversation about the positive impact of WiSA on the aquaculture sector.](#)



“Most companies were paying statutory paternity but when I spoke to new dads, they were saying they weren’t taking that time off because they couldn’t afford to. On the back of that I went back with a proposal to change all our family-friendly policies ... I hope this is us putting our money where our mouth is: You mean more to us than that, your families mean more to us than that. And hopefully you’re with us for a long time.”

**Tracy Bryant Shaw,
Head of HR, Scottish Sea Farms**

First in the WiSA interview series, featuring Noelia Rodriguez

May 2020

First virtual coffee morning in response to the pandemic

June 2020

Interview with Scottish Gov. Chief Vet, Sheila Voas

September 2020

Second WiSA mentoring cohort

January 2021

First Women Returners Programme

January 2021

First WiSA Awards launched on IWD 2021

March 2021

CREATING AN ONLINE MEETING PLACE: THE WISA FORUM

WiSA launched a new digital forum in October 2021 to encourage collaboration and support among its members, promoting cross-sector networking and discussions, and the sharing of news and opportunities. The aim of this forum is to provide a safe space for the WiSA community to connect, collaborate, speak freely to one another, and provide peer support.



SEEKING A CROSS-SECTOR STEER: THE WISA ADVISORY GROUP

The WiSA Advisory Group has evolved during the three years since launch. Some members have moved on to other sectors, and new faces have joined the group. We would like to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed: many days of hard work go on in the background to make sure WiSA is there to deliver on its aims and objectives. The current Group includes Teresa Garzon, PatoGen; Heather Jones, SAIC; Mary Fraser, SAIC; Matilda Lomas, Scottish Salmon Company; Donald Waring, Mowi; Helena Reinardy, SAMS; Nikki Milne, Scottish Government; Marie Smedley, Xelect; Lindsay Pollock, Salmon Scotland; Iona Campbell, Scottish Government.

CELEBRATING TALENT: THE WISA AWARDS

The WiSA Awards were launched in 2021 to recognise exceptional women in the sector. The inaugural awards went to these inspirational colleagues:

- Up-and-Coming Woman of the Year (under 30):
Connie Rose Pattillo-Hague, Mowi
- Aquaculture Lifetime Achievement: Professor Sandra Adams, formerly of the University of Stirling's Institute of Aquaculture
- Role Model of the Year, Tracy Bryant-Shaw

The 2022 WiSA Awards will be announced at an event in Edinburgh on International Women's Day to celebrate WiSA's third anniversary. The categories have been revised and expanded to include Rising Star, Aquaculture Lifetime Achievement, Role Model of the Year, Mentor of the Year and Innovative Research Champion. Over 50 WiSA members have registered for this celebratory event, at which Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, will give a keynote speech. WiSA chair, Teresa Garzon, will also outline what comes next for WiSA.

"WiSA has created a community for much-needed conversation and celebration of women and men working well together in aquaculture. It's exciting to see newcomers learning about how hard we work and joining the network."

**Matilda Lomas, Scottish Salmon Company –
WiSA Advisory group member**

"Over the last three years, it has been rewarding to see the number of women working in aquaculture, and also to watch women progress in their careers, rising through the ranks."

Mary Fraser, SAIC – WiSA Co-Secretary

"WiSA has created a professional network of support for women to progress in the sector."

Teresa Garzon, PatoGen – WiSA Chair

"I was very proud to be involved with WiSA from the beginning and it is fantastic to see how much has been achieved so far. It allows women a safe space in which to develop skills. Often just talking with others in the same situation, or those who are further ahead in their career, can be extremely helpful. It is encouraging to see the impact WiSA has had on equality and inclusion in the industry. I applaud their efforts on behalf of women in aquaculture and wish all well for future endeavours."

Rowena Hoare, former WiSA Co-Chair

"WiSA is an achievement in that it continues to be a shining example of how working together can improve equality so that our children can look forward to a brighter, fairer future with rewarding careers."

Robin McLean, former WiSA Advisory group member

Virtual WiSA training programmes for sector members

Launch of the online WiSA Forum

Second Women Returners Programme

Heather Jones interviewed by United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture

International Women's Day, third anniversary of WiSA

March 2021

October 2021

January 2022

February 2022

March 2022

WHERE WE ARE GOING

As part of WiSA's vision for the future, over the next three years, we will:

- **ENCOURAGE** more women of all ages to enter the sector, through initiatives like the Women Returners Programme, the New Wave of Talent campaign, and others.
- **SUPPORT** women already working in aquaculture to progress their careers, through mentoring programmes, networking events, sharing of vacancies and careers advice, and provision of dedicated training opportunities.
- **IDENTIFY** barriers that can stop women from entering the sector – or from thriving within it – through workshops and research. And liaise actively with employers, government representatives, decision-makers and skills providers to help alleviate or remove these challenges.
- **ENSURE** that equal opportunities remain a constant focus, in the knowledge that our sector will benefit from the wider skill sets that come from diversity
- **RAISE** awareness and membership of WiSA through a coherent communications strategy, with activities and output including events, promotional material, video interviews and other digital content.
- **EXPAND** the membership and usage of the WiSA Forum as a lively, engaging and safe online space for women in Scottish aquaculture and their supporters.
- **WORK** with diversity champions in other sectors, with professionals in the supply chain, and with the wider innovation network, to share best practice and gain fresh perspectives.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



JOIN US



Join the network's Facebook group: search 'Women in Scottish Aquaculture'



Subscribe to the WISA newsletter for opportunities and updates



Follow us on Instagram @womeninscottishaqua



Join the WiSA forum to connect with members and join in the conversation



Look out for our WiSA networking events throughout Scotland